

AGN. NO.

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

JULY 5, 2016

Pursuit of Countywide Homeless Funding Measure on the November 2016 Ballot

The quest to end homelessness has become the defining moral, civil rights and social justice issue of our time. In a State where 115,000 men, women and children are homeless every night, Los Angeles County (County) bears a disproportionate share of the challenge with 47,000 living on our streets, in cars, and in other deplorable conditions.

Homelessness has come to the forefront as the most prominent issue of concern to the general public, and particularly voters. Since March, over ten polls commissioned by conservative and progressive pollsters, academic institutions, think tanks, philanthropy, and municipal governments, including multiple polls by the County, all highlight the electorate's overwhelming concern for the issue of homelessness. Further, these polls signal the electorate's willingness to increase taxes (whether it be through a tax on high-income earners, a parcel tax or sales tax) in order to generate ongoing revenue to address this challenge. Consistently, homelessness has polled higher than public safety, transportation, education and health - issues that are traditionally top-of-mind amongst the public. According to pollsters, this level of interest and concern is unprecedented.

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Government at all levels has advanced strategies to address this crisis. For example, on Thursday, June 30th, the California State Assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution urging Governor Brown to declare a state of emergency due to the reprehensible number of people that are homeless statewide, with the objective that this declaration will lead to the immediate allocation of State funding and personnel to address the crisis. This followed a unanimously-approved motion by the Board of Supervisors to compel such action.

The California State Senate also initiated the “No Place Like Home” initiative that leverages existing Mental Health Service Act funds to create a \$2 billion bond to provide housing for mentally ill homeless individuals statewide. In addition, on Monday, June 27th, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously approved placing a general obligation bond on the November 2016 ballot to generate \$1.2 billion to subsidize the capital costs associated with creating permanent housing for the chronically homeless. However, neither bond would fund supportive and mental health services, or operating rental subsidies, to support the new housing that would be created.

The County must now do its part to facilitate a meaningful region-wide response to ensure that sufficient funding is available to provide mental health and supportive services for the homeless. As the recent homeless count demonstrated, at least 30% of the 47,000 homeless persons in the County have significant mental health issues. Investment in supportive services, especially those targeting the severely mentally ill, will ensure that we can continue to make strides to move individuals off the streets and into housing. Thereafter, sufficient supportive services to address mental health issues are critical to ensure the ongoing success of any permanent housing investment. Studies confirm that successfully housing the homeless and linking them with support services and employment save taxpayer dollars in avoidable health, law enforcement, property devaluation, and other costs.

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The Board of Supervisors (Board) led an effort in coordination with all 88 cities to adopt a strategic plan to prioritize and implement solutions to prevent and end homelessness (County Homeless Initiative Strategies) – an effort that culminated in February 2016 with 47 recommendations. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority has calculated that, to meet the current need across the County, not counting construction costs, at least \$450 million is needed annually to provide supportive services (including mental health services and substance abuse services) and operating/rental subsidies. To date, this need remains unfunded on an ongoing basis.

The Board has made homelessness one of its top priorities, along with health integration, child safety, and Sheriff's Department oversight. For months, it has studied potential revenue options to fund these much needed services. Now is the time for the Board to identify an ongoing funding stream to put before voters in November that can finance the strategies to meaningfully prevent and reduce the number of homeless in communities across the County through the provision of appropriate mental health and supportive services.

The most recent County-commissioned poll demonstrated that over 69% of likely November 2016 voters would support an annual 3 cent per square foot parcel tax to generate ongoing funding to address the County's homeless crisis. Specifically, voters support a measure that would provide prevention and emergency support services, including job training, rental subsidies, counseling, treatment for mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, and create permanent and temporary affordable housing for children, seniors, families, foster youth, veterans, the disabled and homeless adults, with citizen oversight and independent audits.

The County has worked collectively with stakeholders from throughout the region on the Homeless Initiative Strategies which should serve as a framework for the expenditure plan of a ballot measure. The time to act is now.

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I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Direct the Chief Executive Officer to report back to the Board of Supervisors (Board) at the July 12, 2016 Board Meeting with a draft 3 cent per square foot parcel tax revenue measure dedicated to homelessness, including a draft resolution and expenditure plan, in order for the Board to consider its adoption and placement on the November 8, 2016 ballot.

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(YV/DW)